

Onanism and Sexual Abuse: A History of Two Obsessions
(Onanismo y abusos sexuales: historia de dos obsesiones.)

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Abstract: A truly comprehensive sociological approach to the problem of child sexual abuse requires a historical review of these phenomena in order to situate them within the overall sexuality so characteristic of the western world, as referred to by Foucault. This historical investigation reviews the anti-masturbatory campaigns typical of child discourse from the 17th and 18th centuries. The aim of the present article is to give a brief comparative outline in which these two preoccupations, masturbation and sexual abuse, are related in some of their most significant characteristics. These parallels are surprisingly fruitful and include their invisible and universal nature and the dramatization of their effects together with the way these interact. The objective is not so much to create a relationship between the two realities as to reveal in a critical manner some of the pitfalls which have converted modern discourse on abuse into something very similar to the form of that other obsession. This similarity materializes particularly in the mechanisms proposed in order to fight against this new object of social preoccupation. Finally it is suggested that it is productive to seek to understand this current concern historically and sociologically, as other authors have done with the other obsession, rather than seeing it as the logical reaction to reasonable preoccupation for victims of abuse.

Keywords: child sexual abuse, masturbation, onanism, childhood, sexuality.

[76] "But a society, like ours, where the family is the most active focus of sexuality, and where there are undoubtedly demands upon it that maintain and prolong its existence, incest, for very different reasons and in other ways, occupies a central position; constantly being solicited and rejected, object of obsession and requisition, fearful secret and indispensable union. While appearing to be the ultimate family taboo, it functions as a means of alliance; but also that which is continually required in order for the family to be a focus for the permanent stoking of sexuality." (Foucault, 1995: 133)

Introduction

In my efforts to comprehend the sexual abuse of minors, and in particular the recent social interest in it, as historical and sociological phenomenon, without restricting myself to its particular manifestations and casuistry, but without renouncing it either, I immediately embarked on a study of the cultural configuration of childhood and the family in the western world over the course of the last several centuries. During this journey, I found myself immersed in a curious world where the origins of contemporary pedagogy had apparently been forged; new ideologies, authors, programs and institutions, centers of attention and, above all, new obsessions. I would come to understand that comprehending the current discourses, politics, and movements surrounding the sexual abuse of minors would require an examination of, among other things, the

modern meaning of childhood and its existence within the family. Childhood and family, two related realities that were configured historically to be associated with a new element, closely interwoven with them from that moment on: sexuality. (Foucault, 1995)

And sexuality entered into the realms of the family and the child, or perhaps it entered the former by way of the latter. In any event this new entity, which was to be the child and its childhood, would from this moment forward be an endangered one, an entity to be protected and at the same time channeled; shielding not only their exterior, but what is more serious and difficult than even that, and, most especially, their "sexuality," from their natural yet dangerous instincts. The risk of falling into bad habits, of self-complacency, of being dragged down by sexual impulses they possess but do not suit them/us because of their terrible physical and moral consequences, both collective and individual. And surrounding sexuality, with its masturbatory expression and cardinal obsession, sustaining a network of control through a discourse, primarily pedagogical at first but then also medical and psychological later on, all directed towards warding off the danger: "Parents, families, educators, doctors, and later on psychologists were supposed to relay to their charges, in a constant manner, this germ of sexual preciousness and danger, dangerousness and danger; such instruction being characterized first and foremost by a war against onanism that in the west stretched on over a period of some two centuries." (Foucault, 1995: 4)

It certainly sounds like all of this pedagogical and medical preoccupation with the sin of Onan collaborated, via prohibition, in the historical construction of that more recent device, as Foucault would call it, that was and is sexuality. We write off the former exhortations, those entreaties from pedagogues, as relics of the past, eliciting, at most, laughter: or, we highlight them as Exhibit A of a dark chapter in the history of perpetrators and victims, oppressors and the oppressed. There is nothing more to be said about that; nevertheless, others, and I believe this myself, will attest to the fact that traces of the past are still quite visible today. (Scherer, 1983) But when debating significant present day parallels with masturbation, there has been too little focus on the degree of attention that it actually elicited in past centuries, basically the 18th and 19th, and comparing that anxiety with other, more recent ones.

At the same time that I was progressing in my studies, I recognized an interest awakening [77] within me, in the whole area of the rules and discourse surrounding the vice that children can fall into. However, at least in part, I was drawn to it for reasons different from most others. An idea kept coming back to me as I was reading those texts, those anxieties; an almost immoral idea that could be summed up in just a few words: the curious global resemblance between the fight against masturbation and the fight against the sexual abuse of minors. Between one obsession and another.

As the reader might imagine, it was not turning out to be so easy to work with this idea sprouting in my notes when the differences between one problem and another would seem to be too profound and evident, when associating the two questions was resulting in more disrespect for the victims of sexual abuse, a phenomenon that authors and society were beginning to define as a real social cancer. Nevertheless, I recall that in those days I began encountering various observations by other authors which would likewise suggest this association, from differing perspectives. [F1] Thus was established within me an interest that would grow into a possible comparative study of the two realities, so different and at the same time so similar in appearance;

or even, the possibility of hypothesizing a historical association between the two entities, in the sense of finding in one a precedent for the other. In fact, in the fight against child masturbation, a sort of self-abuse, it was not unusual to look with suspicion upon certain adults who were around children, such as educators, clergy, nannies, nurses, and servants.

1. Two Different Things

I dare say that equating the issue of masturbation during the 17th through 19th centuries with that of child sexual abuse in the last decades of the 20th might seem absurd to many; and I know of some people who would fly into a rage upon encountering such a hypothesis, given their, on occasion, laudable militancy in the fight against the sexual abuse of minors. We know that the practices and discourses emphasizing the terrible consequences of children masturbating, i.e., pallor, hives, acne, boils, aches, deafness, trembling, hemorrhaging, and all of the other personal misfortunes imaginable, not to mention social degeneracy, were totally groundless, and that although newer scientific discoveries would attempt to validate them, from our point of view these were worthless. Nevertheless, we are told that the conclusions regarding sexual abuse are based on rigorous scientific observation which, although debatable in some of its aspects, is not so in its fundamental conclusion: a sexual relationship between a minor and an adult is abusive, and therefore, harmful, with demonstrable negative consequences in the short as well as long term.

On the other hand, in past centuries there was an attempt to protect children from themselves, whereas in the case of abuse, there is an effort to protect them from aggression by other people who are significantly older than they are. In this case, they would find themselves defenseless. In the first place because of the existing power difference between the two individuals, which would increase when the abuse was of the incestuous type or was perpetrated by an adult with some sort of authority over the minor. And in the second place because of the evident immaturity that characterizes minors as far as comprehending these acts and protecting themselves from these attacks is concerned. The situation would, in turn, be further aggravated when it involved smaller children, or children with some sort of disability.

In conclusion, in the first of our questions, chronologically speaking, those fanatics were seeking to put an end to a practice that we now know to be completely natural, or at least "habitual," in the development of human sexuality; but in our fight against the sexual abuse of minors, we are trying to stop behaviors which are clearly harmful, culturally abnormal, [78] and to some, universally contrary to human nature, at least when they are of the incestuous kind; in fact, for many, we are confronted with one of the greatest atrocities that a human being can endure: "Probably, at this point, there is little doubt that child sexual abuse constitutes one of the most intense of psychological traumas, and that its consequences are substantially destructive to the structuralization of the personality. It is possible to compare its effects to that of a shot against the entire psychic apparatus [F2]: it produces injuries in the emotional fabric of such magnitude that it makes it difficult to see how the psyche will heal and what its sequelae will be." (Intebi, 1998) And this is apparently the only option in the scientific and social discourse over sexual abuse; departing from it can be dangerous.

Returning once more to masturbation: It is not a question of denying its potentially "harmful" nature; masturbation can have tragic consequences in some children, teenagers, and

even adults, though they never reach the extremes of blindness or even facial blemishes; but we understand that when they would or did occur, they were caused by the problematization that would be telegraphed by parents, teachers, doctors, etc. in their educational efforts regarding, and dramatic reactions to, these acts. In this case, the enduring problematization of some sexual behaviors would be in keeping with the social and cultural contexts surrounding the individual which, in some ways, also shape sexuality; these enduring negatives can, in and of themselves, result in a person suffering illnesses, conflicts, and difficulties at different points during the course of their lives.

In the case of the sexual abuse of minors there exist, in its own moment in time, some established orientations along similar lines (Kinsey, 1967; Ullerstam, 1999), highlighting the social conditions which unnecessarily problematize those types of experiences and the familial or institutional reactions that aggravate the situation once they are discovered. [F3] At the present time, many researchers are pursuing an interest in studying how the cultural and personal contexts in which abuse occurs can heighten or lessen its negative effects. Thus we find numerous studies focused on the effects that familial and social reactions can have on the minor, on the negative consequences of concealment, denial of the act or simply "minimization" on the part of persons close to the minor, especially a customary interest, in cases of incest, in the mother's relatively typical posture, therefore in terms of the harmful sequelae, not to mention pathologies, that can be induced in the victim by the whole social and judicial process that usually follows in these cases. (Berliner, L., and Conte, J., 1995; Browne, J., 1996; Henry, J., 1997)

In short, the notion of reducing the problematization and pathologization of these experiences as a way of helping their "victims," acknowledging the possibility that some of them are not necessarily harmful or not so injurious that they are defended against, is an idea scarcely mentioned at the present time and, we might say, is politically -- and scientifically, some might add -- incorrect. In fact, persons who have tried to broach this issue have always done so with a sort of odd tact, intending to avoid a "misinterpretation" of their proposals. (Stainton, W., Stainton, R., and Musitu, G., 1994; Manseau, H., 1993; de la Cruz., C., 1999)

So for example, it is regularly accepted that the possible consequences of an improper sexual education would manifest themselves in the child having difficulty denouncing the act or comprehending that he or she is being abused. Examples of such statements can be found in "practical handbooks" such as the one by Besten, 1997; but never as causing long-term, severe problems in his/her relationship with the adult in question. It is not viable to consider, even as a [79] theoretical hypothesis, the possibility that through a proper sexual education, or via different attitudes towards children's sexuality, lasting positive or less negative effects from these types of experiences might be fostered. Commentaries from some voices denouncing the hysteria originating from the family and from professionals as the principle reasons why sexual relationships between minors and adults are experienced as negative, or those from certain collectives claiming it is possible that some of these relationships would be pleasant and rewarding, or at least not necessarily harmful, are fundamentally rejected as reflecting the excesses of the "sexual revolution" which, in its headlong march towards liberation, ended up justifying the unjustifiable. All sexual relations between an adult and a minor, the age criteria varying based on cultural context or author, would be abusive by definition and, therefore, negative, if not at the time they occur, then certainly in terms of their future consequences:

"Nevertheless, not all self-described feminists agree with the incest model. Some groups of women and some sectors regarded as "progressive" argue that the prohibition and taboo against incest are no more than the fruit of sexual repression and traditional morality. There exists in these sectors a tendency to vindicate such relations, based on sexual liberation and the presence of desire, such as it is. We regard this analysis as a pendular counter-reaction to the traditional models: it goes past authoritarianism, rigid norms, and prohibition into absolute foolishness and gratuitousness, and in the name of freedom, to the polar opposite permissiveness, without proposing alternative criteria based on the well-being and happiness of all of the persons involved, without having assessed the implications of the various behaviors, and without assuming responsibility for the consequences of these acts. From this "pseudo-liberty" it is very easy to derive a defense of pornography, prostitution, pedophilia, sado-masochism...and other behaviors that generate suffering for many people, the majority of whom are girls and women." (Bezemer 1994: 12)

Thus for the great majority of people, the comparison in which I have immersed myself would be misplaced and of no interest, either theoretical or practical. I will leave, for the moment, the matter of its appraisal to the individual reader; for the present I will dedicate myself to that comparative analysis, above all, to the similarities between the two phenomena; in order to arouse an interest which is, to my understanding, merited by this study. In the meantime we shall make use of a purely intellectual exercise, which is not harmful to enter into.

2. Grasping the Invisible

An especially interesting level of comparison is that of the discourses and practices relating to the prevention of the problem before it occurs, or indeed its immediate detection in cases where it has already happened. The medical mechanisms, pedagogically instituted for the prevention and/or detection of masturbatory acts, were, by all indications, disproportionate; included were techniques ranging from sleeping with the lights on to sadistic mechanisms of infibulation, to controlling the diet to the type of clothing designed for children. Well then, one will say, the strategies were themselves part of the problem, aggravating the duration and the tragic consequences for children's physical and moral welfare. In the area of sexual abuse prevention programs have also been proposed, essentially of an educative sort, where minors are taught to recognize when they are being abused and how they can defend themselves; programs whose efficacy and possible iatrogenic effects are certainly controversial. Generally speaking they appear to be accepted as valid; nevertheless the arguments advanced by their detractors, which to my mind are quite valid, should also be taken into account; I shall not be elaborating on these in the present work. [F4]

[80] It should also be pointed out that, in the same way that the pedagogues of the 19th century were obliged to mention explicitly and in great detail, a problem that prior to then was not of particular significance or social interest, in order to give parents and students a concrete idea of exactly what it was that was harmful (Elschenbroich, 1979), specialists in preventing abuse via educating children have to alert them to approaches which, quite possibly, many had not considered attacks or aggression: "Children must learn to distinguish the signs of a situation that goes against their will, or to recognize the first stages of potential abuse and thereby be able to avoid it (which does not mean that all of the responsibility for their safety is entirely theirs)."

(Resten 1997: 143) It is evident; they are trying to prepare people, particularly potential victims, to detect an abusive situation before it is too late. One "discovers" the problem and "constructs" it by means of an entire discourse and practice for its prevention, which of necessity consists first of giving it a name, and then a detailed description.

The prevention of sexual abuse cannot go much further than educational programs, except for the possible indirect effect of other strategies such as the potentially dissuasive impact of increasing the condemnation, which is evidently arguable, as well as the efficacy of the legal and political systems, social consciousness, etc. In any case, and given that the principal problem is sexual abuse of the incestuous type [F5], in order to prevent through education) we should take a serious look at teaching boys and girls to protect themselves from their own fathers and mothers.

Nevertheless, the key point in this whole phenomenon of sexual abuse, which might also give us some more room to criticize its social construction, is the reference to the mechanisms for detecting and proving sexual abuse. As an expert specializing in therapy for victims of sexual aggression told me: "Half the battle, no, more than half, three-quarters of the battle is detection, and there lies the great complexity of the whole thing." [F6] Given the invisibility common to these cases, their easy concealment and the absence of physical indicators that might remain on the minor's body, as well as determined action concerning detection and proof, have made this the bread-and-butter of the professionals laboring in this field. That opacity, added to by the children's own silence, converts the job of detection into a quasi-detective process, or nearly so, that can very easily devolve into strategies of a criminalistic nature, where helping professionals begin to become quasi-political or quasi-judicial agents. (Money, 1985) This is, once again, the same schema that we find in the case of child masturbation: "Educators, therefore, have to assume that it is not possible to expect a confession on the child's part. The barriers between children and adults have become so strong that other models are required, of a criminalistic nature ('perpetrator'). Salzmann's explications of the problem of diagnosing the resultant harm are illuminating in relation to the image of what educators are actually supposed to do about it: 'The sins to which I am referring are of such a kind that they always leave traces behind. As with a small collection of insects where, based on the excrement that a given species of caterpillars has deposited beneath a certain tree, the educator concludes that that species does in fact live in the branches of said tree, in the same way, he may also confirm the existence of said sins from the traces that they leave behind.' A look at the body's general posture, at the color of the skin..." (Elschenbroich, 1979)

We will see how in the case of the sexual abuse of minors one is again exhorted to that attentive sensitivity required of a concerned [81] teacher, a preoccupied father, a distressed mother, or a circumspect doctor. Vigilance and suspicion in the face of the smallest change in the child's behavior, and the indicators would vary from one era to another, that could put us on the trail of erotic excess, debilitating onanism ... an experience of abuse. And it is that attention lavished in the 19th century on child masturbation which turns out to be curiously similar to exhortations for the detection of sexual abuse: "Sexual abuse is difficult to detect because it is a type of aggression that is not visible, in contrast to physical mistreatment. Because of that, the teacher must be very proactive in order to ferret it out." (Words of Haroldo Oquendo, representative of the Guatemala National Commission Against Child Maltreatment. *Prensa Libre*. Guatemala, Thursday, August 12, 1999.) And as it is in Guatemala, so too is it in the

United States -- where the situation, it is said, has approached the Kafkaesque -- and in Europe.

And therefore it is clear what is the intuition that shall always guide professional work. (Berliner and Conte, 1993) As a professional specializing in the protection of minors commented: "...that is, so that at the moment the diagnosis becomes apparent, well then, you are able to sense, you can suppose that perhaps, but, clearly, intuitive proof that you would see which therefore, seeing this confirmed, confirmed, well yes sometimes, because medically that has turned out to be the case, but normally we think about the signs, and we believe..." Working intuitively but obsessed with uncovering the secret, with accusing, with punishing, in the belief that this is the only way of helping, of finding definitive proof, can lead to "professional" practices worthy of the 19th century's fight against childhood eroticism.

I will not discuss, though I will question, whether it is a good idea to uncover and denounce the majority of child sexual abuse experiences, but I do have to ask whether this end justifies some of the means proposed, and whether we shouldn't reorient our investigations in terms of new perspectives for comprehending the problem and its solution, away from the combative and blind crusade that is already showing signs of cracking.

3. Innocent Experiences

Another point of interesting convergence is the connection with the way in which minors, boys and girls, experience these types of events. Regarding sexual abuse there are no definitive conclusions, since one of its fundamental characteristics is, as would be expected, the great diversity that exists; thus we come across boys and girls whose experiences are not strictly traumatic, painful, or distressing, but also include what for them could be quite gratifying activities, while there are many others in which one does indeed observe an intensely unhealthy and traumatic experience; the majority would be found along a continuum between the two extremes. The reasons why they experience one kind of feeling and not another vary greatly, and are related to factors ranging from personal variables, such as age, sex, education, personal situation, etc., to their previous relationship to the adult as well as the nature and duration of subsequent acts. It is the combination of these multiple elements that gives rise to the diversity alluded to above.

In any event, I am interested in highlighting an aspect concerning which authors are more or less in agreement: Children who are not conscious of the pathological or harmful nature of these acts owe that ignorance to their immaturity, which prevents them from understanding the true scope of the acts. If the relationship with the adult is ongoing, especially if this adult is someone very close within their familiar and/or social circles, the minor will become, little by little, ever more conscious of the strangeness of these acts, and possibly of their perniciousness as well. This is a kind of process in which the minor, as his/her maturation proceeds, at last [82] reaches a higher degree of consciousness regarding what has been occurring, and begins to feel disenchanted about it; they would not have felt that previously, and may even have experienced it as pleasurable.

In the case of masturbation we encounter a very similar phenomenon. The ignorance in which the child was said to live in his/her innocence over a long period of time of the harmful nature of these acts was something that was often highlighted by the theoreticians of the anti-

masturbation struggle: "Thus I remained, until I was twenty-one, in the most injurious ignorance, just like thousands of young people and an even larger number of young women, through the fault of their parents, teachers, educators, protectors, etc., and mostly through their own frightful perdition. It never crossed my mind that such activities would be harmful, and that they carry with them such terrible and dreadful consequences. I considered it to be something that was merely improper, not to be done in public. If only someone had told me it was something injurious, forbidden, and sinful!" (Salzmann, *On the Secret Sins of Youth*, 1819, cited in Elschenbroich, 1979: 162.) We have already commented how one of the objectives of anti-masturbatory pedagogy was to make these children and young people conscious of the 'error of their ways.

We are dealing, therefore, in both cases with experiences that the girl or boy may have mistakenly viewed as positive or harmless until, through their own maturity or because someone makes them conscious of it, the minor comes to see the injurious nature of these acts and the need to try to stop and even denounce them.

This is the point at which it might be more problematic to delineate the commonalities between the two phenomena. Practically all authors are united in pointing out the difficult situations in which minors who suffer abuse can find themselves, highlighting the sordid games in which they are obliged to participate. It is evident that in a significant percentage of cases the situation is, sadly, a destructive one; but it is also clear that in many others, also considered sexual abuse, it is not so harmful, and could even be positive. I am not going to get bogged down here in a discussion of the false image that has been "sold" with regard to sexual abuse and its dramatic statistics; this is not the place. But, nevertheless, I would like to draw attention to the simplistic and unnecessarily dramatic picture that one is wont to ascribe to each and every type of abuse. Something possibly very similar to that occurred some centuries ago with the popularization of the pernicious consequences of "auto-enervation" as well as more effective strategies for combating this evil. This is what some authors, following Foucault, would come to call "totalizing discourses." (Stainton, Stainton and Musitu, 1994)

Moreover we observe that, as much in the case of onanism as in that of abuse, the victim does not escape the evil. In the case of masturbation, the victim will pay the consequences of his or her own vice; in that of abuse he or she will be condemned by those of others' vices. In fact, the more dramatic consequences will come, if they don't manifest themselves at the time, within a matter of years, with maturity, with age; and, if they are not provided with timely treatment, that is, therapy, they will continue to suffer throughout their entire lives.

4. The Cancer of Mankind

So it is; the sexual abuse of minors has been a kind of surprising "discovery" in many senses of that word, but especially in one: its high incidence rate and its terrible individual and social consequences: "The problem of sexual abuse in childhood and adolescence is a serious one, as much because of its breadth as because of the evidence -- more and more extensive -- of its traumatic short- and long-term effects." Sanchez and Noguero, 1995: 1) A new social defect, like that, in its time, of the evil inclination towards auto-eroticism: "In my experience concerning this dreadful matter, indeed one can [83] scarcely consider as innocents perhaps one in ten young people from refined social strata who are between six and twenty years of age and who are,

undoubtedly, of both sexes. More than a few would be astonished if they had to reckon with the multitude of letters that ... were written to me by unhappy young people, many of them already in a state of complete degradation... Truly this virulent cancer on mankind has continued to leave victims in its wake and has already reached the point of producing depredations much more terrifying than could ever have been imagined by the judges of men and experienced educators." (Campe, preface to the work of Oest (1788), *Instructional Essay for Male and Female Youth Concerning Vices Against Chastity in General and Auto-Enervation in Particular, With a Brief Exposition of the Theory of Procreation*, cited in Elschenbroich, 1979: 165.) This paragraph is not too far removed from some which may be found in many texts about sexual abuse.

Regarding the extent of the latter, we can come across prevalences ranging from 7% up to 62% among adult women and from 6% to 15% among adult men (Thomas and Jamieson, 1995), although the figures would usually be rounded to a more manageable 20% of women and 10% of men. (López and Arnaez, 1989) Naturally such figures can be frightening, especially when we keep to a superficial reading of them, without being aware of the fact that the given percentages would vary a great deal based on the controlling definition of abuse, which can range from sodomizing a two-year-old boy to flirting with a girl of twelve.

The consequences of that perverse evil of centuries past were enumerated in imperturbable lists of morbid symptoms that I think need not be cited here, but which were presented as the practically inevitable consequences of that vice's abuse which, sooner or later, would consume the unwary youth. In the same way, in the case of abuse, according to research results that have come in, its dramatic psychological and physical consequences are presented as inevitable. Promiscuity, fear, mood swings, compulsiveness, hyperactivity, phobias, introversion, guilt, depression, suicidal ideation, fatigue, low self-esteem etc. are some of abuse's short-term sequelae. (Vazquez, 1995; Canton and Cortes, 1997) Long-term effects of sexual abuse include, among others, low self-esteem, fear of men, sexual problems of various kinds, a greater tendency to use alcohol and drugs, a higher risk of suicide, increased probability of prostitution, the appearance of personality disorders, etc. (Vazquez, 1995) Some authors have cast doubt on the gravity and validity of these sorts of conclusions. (Berliner and Conte, 1993). Stainton, Stainton, and Musitu (1994), in an article cited above, question the widely-held belief that sexual abuse must necessarily have inevitable consequences for minors; these beliefs are converted into reality, and apparently are not, in many cases, based on studies with solid foundations but rather on suppositions, derived from the authors' own particular experiences, which are then cited in their work.

At the moment, it is not possible for me to cast doubt on what current works assert regarding these types of experiences and their negative consequences. Nevertheless, they do run the risk of converting child sexual abuse into the sole source of many problems facing children and adults; and I do mean sole. The schema presented is: sexual abuse in childhood equals specific future problem. Thus, for example, it is said that women who have been sexually abused have a higher probability of prostituting themselves in the future, or that minors who have been abused suffer depression. The formula is simple enough to have permeated the entire [84] world with ease and without criticism, but it is so false and incomplete that it neglects the complexity of these processes and the influence of multiple factors on their development.

The consequences of sexual abuse have been described as being so extremely serious,

that many authors recommend inquiring about possible past experiences of sexual abuse in all persons who exhibit symptoms of anxiety, depression, or alcohol abuse (Vazquez, 1995), a proposal that strikes me as disproportionate and out of place, and which also reminds me of a work from the 17th century: "This same teacher then advised that older men and women also submit, with a few minor changes, to such questions because, through frequent experience, he had found that many adults had been infected with this same vice, and had never before confessed it; some initially due to modesty and then later out of forgetfulness; others due to a shyness so intense that they say they never had the resolve to confess it..." (Joan Gerson, Opera. Tractatus de confessione molliciei, cited by Flandrin, J.L. 1984: 290)

I ask myself if this way of presenting and explaining the consequences of child sexual abuse isn't excessively simplistic, and if it wouldn't ignore the complexity of the genesis of every individual problem. Add to that the possibility that researchers and society will neglect the role played by other social problems, such as poverty, marginalization, and unemployment. The way in which a subject experiences an incident of abuse and the manner in which that experience will effect the person in the short- and long-term depend on what happened to him or her in a given situation and how that is interpreted; the idea that his or her future would be constrained by an incident of sexual abuse experienced in childhood seems excessively reductionary and, I dare say, unfortunate. Some authors justify these sorts of conclusions via the high bar of child sexual abuse experiences encountered in our clinics, particularly in cases of "suicidal behavior, borderline personality, and schizo-affective disorders." (Intebi, 1998: 173) This same author cites one study in which it is asserted, for example, that the frequency of incestuous relations in childhood among psychiatric clinic inpatients oscillates between 14% and 46%. For their part, Jackson and Nuttall found, in a sample of social workers, that 21% of the women and 22% of the men had personally experienced abuse in childhood, though they said nothing about the consequences of those experiences. Nevertheless, I suspect that an answer to this question will be forthcoming quite soon, given the repeated scandals over the sexual abuse of minors uncovered by social workers, teachers, etc., who will, undoubtedly, quickly find out about past experiences of abuse and mistreatment.

Although for the moment it remains a hypothesis in need of: proof, my sense is that this intimate and inevitable causal association between child sexual abuse and its ominous short- and long-term consequences is not based on a solid scientific foundation and that it is more a question of faith which, consciously or unconsciously, has been elevated to the status of truth. It is even possible that, upon being characterized as such to the public at-large and to professionals in general, it actually become so, in reality.

5. What's Behind It

Of course, masturbation was just one of many points of interest in, and the struggle to eradicate this behavior one of the many obsessions surrounding, the education of the new childhood. And in any event, comprehending the whole anti-onanism campaign means going beyond the fanatic obsession with auto-eroticism or the steadfast hatred towards everything sexual. All of these aspects were mere superficialities, perhaps more indicative to us of a whole series of [85] social transformations leading to a reformation of the person, of the conduct of a flourishing social class, the bourgeoisie: "That the proscription on masturbation is only one building block in the formation of habits of self-control, of the postponement of pleasure, of

incessant activity in place of unproductive enjoyment, is something which pedagogues expressly affirm." (Elschenbroich, 1979: 179) It is, again, mastery over the very same; once more, sexuality joins the game of the "yes techniques," into a discourse neighboring that evoked by Foucault in his analysis of a classical Greece bent on developing new kinds of existence. (Foucault 1993) It is another example of that precious value that desire possesses, pleasure, eroticism, in order to convert it into an instrument of power and social regulation: "In relationships of power, sexuality is not one of the more muted elements, but rather, one of those which is endowed with the greatest instrumentality." (Foucault, 1991)

It is, therefore, in its social significance, in the formation of a new individual, a new id, in the differentiation of an emerging social class, and in the relationships between parents and offspring where, in the words of Foucault, this pedagogization of the child's sex is inscribed, as more of a means of social, and hence, individual, transformation. "In this way the fight against masturbation is converted into a starting point for the elimination of the undesirable attitude it is presumed to reflect, namely, self-sufficiency in playing with one's own body, which the bourgeoisie must reject as unproductive; the surrender to momentary pleasure, that which stands in direct contradiction to that systematic focus on the long-term which the bourgeoisie must develop in the prosecution of its interests. The bed and rest become zones of danger in middle-class socialization, because the bourgeoisie, above all in the period of early capitalism, had to define itself by the virtue of incessant activity and, at the same time, by strict limits on consumption, distinguishing itself also in this sense from the culture of leisure which characterized the feudal aristocracy. With respect to this, the philanthropist Unger pronounced, in the General Review, that: "Sleep is, at bottom, the only repose to which men should abandon themselves." (Elschenbroich, 1979: 180) And it is not, therefore, strange that masturbation would be condemned as wasting a precious good, a good oriented towards procreation which in the end is frittered away. It is the perversion *par excellence*, the perversion of the purpose that Freud would later define; perhaps the same perversion as that of adults who abuse children.

But what about the case of child abuse? Is there something similar unfolding behind all of this? I do not know. I would cite as the impetus for the present work two articles by Money, which encouraged me to continue to reflect on the possible associations between these two phenomena. In one of the articles, entitled "Epidemic Antisexualism: From Onanism to Satanism" (1999), the author essentially presents the thesis that sexual abuse, or more precisely, the disproportionate and suspect interest in its eradication, the measures put in place for this, and the increase in false accusations, are nothing more than reflections of a growing anti-sexualism, of the same kind that existed at the time of the battles against masturbatory behavior.

It is possible that some of this anti-sexualism was already there but, as this same author put it so well, "The sexual abuse industry has unfolded under the influence of the architects of the sexual counter-reformation...It will be the task of qualified historians to determine the extent to which the sexual counter-reformation has been orchestrated by an anti-sexual cabal, organized by the agencies of religion and government, in the law and by politicians." (Money, 1999: 29) I [86] would not presume, for the moment, to go so far as to speak of an anti-sexual campaign as being the basis of this whole phenomenon, although, if this really is the case, we would need to ask ourselves what's behind it, in the same way that the whole "anti-sexualism" of past centuries would have had a social purpose and been a class strategy.

Nevertheless, it should certainly be pointed out how easily the struggle against child sexual abuse can become intertwined with normative and combative attitudes towards sexuality itself. The uneasiness and mistrust emanating from every professional can lead to situations such as the one related to me by a mother who brought her daughter to see the pediatrician, who in turn observed a mark on the child's buttocks. When the mother was questioned as to the origin of the mark, she stated that the girl had been playing with her father and he had bitten her. The pediatrician gave her a serious look, and told her to ask her husband not to bite the girl on that part of her body again.

It is possible to encounter, in some texts, ideas which are clearly normative, and that are associated with a negative view of the body and of sexuality: "Some decades ago, in certain sociocultural environments, one might well have seen parents, regardless of gender, sharing the daily shower or bath with their children. Alarmed, people will ask: 'Is this also sexual abuse?' Although I would want to familiarize myself with a given situation prior to rendering an opinion, I would say that, in general, the idea does not come from the children but rather the adults, who believe that such natural contact is essential or that it is appropriate that their children have an unprejudiced awareness of their bodies. Nevertheless, these adults fail to tell us how, faced with the children's silence, it is really we who are imposing something we believe to be appropriate. It is not an abusive act by clinical and legal definitions; it is just an invasion of the little ones' privacy, disguised as pedagogical progressivism." (Intebi, 1998: 161) The adult "abuser" might even be accused of taking advantage of the minor's biological predisposition towards pleasure, making him or her feel things that he/she should not..

An erroneous understanding of childhood eroticism can be used to elaborate more arguments against sexual abuse, and even to justify children's improper conduct: "In general, upon comparing the sexual arousal a child is able to experience with that of an adult, we will conclude that they are not comparable in the least. It is simply too much for the child, because his or her psychosexual makeup is incapable of proper release through orgasm. The desire and need for some sort of release will come to manifest itself, in some of them, in fainting spells or the loss of bodily control (frequently urethral). It would also appear that this yearning for release can transform itself into the desire for an experience of penetration, passive, with both explosive and implosive characteristics; perhaps as a sort of anal orgasm. There is no doubt that this implies a serious threat to the infantile id, but we can speculate as to a better way than orgasm for a child to approximate the experience. It is always preferable to encourage the desire for explosive penetration or even castration, as opposed to remaining trapped in prolonged torment and, in fact unbearably, in preliminary sexual games." (Shengold, L. (1989), *Soul Murder: The Effects of Childhood Abuse and Deprivation*, cited in Intebi, 1998: 160.) It is possible that we will have to denounce and combat sexual abuse but also try to look for more accurate and serious arguments, avoiding the construction of such a limited and yet dramatic vision of childhood sexuality.

Masturbation has been situated within a wider context of the transformations of childhood, the family, and the middle-class. In the course of this entire comparison between masturbation and the sexual abuse of minors, one fundamental coincidence has not yet been pointed out: In both cases, we are dealing with child sexuality in its essential [87] and most problematic localization: the family. The question we must answer is where to situate the problem of child sexual abuse, its multiple facets, and the significance it has at the present time~

My hypothesis of record is that said processes are intimately associated with other social transformations that are intertwined with the construction of childhood in general, perhaps with the expansion of its borders and a more precise definition of the status of the adult, where the "sexual" [F7] is nothing but a productive strategy. Perhaps it is also a question of power and domination, of the social control of some groups by others. Whatever the case, we have seen that all of these phenomena are strongly animated, in a useful symbiosis, by the economic and social interests of new professional groups, heir to those specialists in "the social" who commenced running through their own paces in the last century, with their powerful instruments, techniques, and knowledge in tow. (Donzelot, 1990; Picon to, 1996)

The reality of the sexual abuse of minors remains in flux and we will have to let a lot of time pass in order to see how it evolves, leaving to future researchers the question of its meaning and significance in present society. Then we will see whether it makes sense to put this modern "obsession" on the same level as that of centuries past and demonstrate once again "how in reality the control of the instincts in question, the regulation of impulses, the molding of the 'natural needs,' that is, the cultivation of the outer man, were devices not at all disdained in the construction of modern rationality at the same time that instruments were placed at the service of certain social groups in order to impose their way of life and obtain dominion and domination." (Varela, 1988) At the moment, I insist, it is only a hypothesis.

6. Conclusions

I will end where I perhaps should have begun. I gave this article a title which characterized the two phenomena, onanism and the sexual abuse of minors, as "obsessions," and I will need to explain why. It seems clear that, in the case of the former, that obstinacy truly did manifest itself, at least on the discursive level. As for sexual abuse, I do not know if we would be able to speak of obsession or simply a reasonable preoccupation in the face of a problem of this caliber; I do not know whether we are in the presence of a real or imaginary danger. In the United States a certain psychosis regarding it may have manifested itself, leading to dubious professional practices in the search for the guilty, an association between sexual abuse and Satanism, the proliferation of false accusations, etc. (Money, 1999; Kaminer, 2001) It is evident that in that country the figure of the pedophile or "child abuser" is more or less at the same level as that of the serial killer or terrorist, a fact which is readily observable in some North American films -- for example, in "Alien 3" the protagonist falls into a kind of maximum security space prison on a lost planet where, along with terrorists and serial killers, there is of course an individual who "violates children." As one author his commented, the "man in the trenchcoat" has taken the place of the "man with the candy" in our imagining of the risks effecting childhood. (Delgado, 1992)

The investigation of sexual abuse has increased considerably in the last decades relative to other types of mistreatment (Doyle, 1996), leading to a proliferation of programs on and specialists in the issue, pushing aside scientific concerns but above all any lingering uneasiness or political and social concerns. I think that in Spain it has not gone to the extremes that it has in the United states, and let us hope it never does. Nevertheless, there are certainly indications that there is growing alarm; indications that, if it is not an obsession, it is acting like one. The subject has attained great prominence in the media in recent years, above [88] all immediately following the revelation of numerous cases, networks of pederasts, child pornography, etc. Several

controversial judicial decisions have even sparked a debate over our notions regarding sexual abuse and the type of proof required to convict someone -- with respect to this, see an illustrative article by Javier Marias in the March 6, 1999 *El País* entitled "Guilty or Guilty."

Just as we do not know with certainty the extent to which the pedagogical or medical discourses of past centuries over the sex of the child had insinuated themselves into the daily practices of familial and scholastic life, neither do we know how intervention in cases involving the sexual abuse of minors is actually unfolding. I believe that this is one of the fundamental lines along which we must orient future studies on this question. Uncovering the meanings associated with the same, like that of aggression, and the way in which these have been constructed historically, cultural and individual limitations on the interpretation of these acts, modes of intervention and their utility, the experiences of all of the protagonists, intentions, premeditated or not, of preventing these kinds of acts through mistrust, the false allegations, the "abuse" of abuse, young people who accuse their parents in order to leave the house, accusations in divorce cases or the ready and successful resort to victimization; the necessity of new categories that better grasp the diversity and complexity of reality, etc., are some of the many aspects that are left to us to look into, in order to comprehend this reality a little better, starting with the possible existence of other, more sensible and less criminalizing premises which, instead of leading us to fight something, invite us to understand it.

The nets laid out by the adult in order to protect the child are, at the same time, snares in which the adults themselves remain trapped (Scherer, 1983) because the discourses and mechanisms put in place to prevent or eliminate a "problem" are not innocuous tactics, but rather ones which sometimes stimulate unexpected transformations in other spheres of our lives. In the case of masturbation, it has been suggested that efforts designed to impede it may, in fact, have promoted the very conduct it would claim to be eliminating, perhaps merely drawing attention to it. (Elschenbroich, 1979) I would not presume to assert that, in the case of the sexual abuse of minors, we have indirectly facilitated its existence; but I do believe that it is possible to induce a social transformation in directions that, at present, I am unable to discern, and which will need to be looked into.

It is evident that masturbation and sexual abuse are not the same; but I wanted to demonstrate that comparing the two turns out to be useful to us for some very different reasons. In the first place, perhaps they will enlighten us regarding the socially-established mechanisms for fighting against the sexual abuse of minors, their deficiencies, and their risks; the battle to grasp the "invisible," its portrayal as "social defect" or the universalization of the experience, are examples of how the problem has been constructed with postures more normative and combative than comprehensive. In the second place, its sociological and therefore historical interest has permitted us to suggest that the "sexual abuse of minors," in the multiple facets of the phenomenon, must be understood as constantly evolving, historically significant realities that will have to be understood within the historical framework and context in which they are constructed. Initially, the argumentation has allowed us to present some criticisms of the social construction of the sexual abuse of minors in order to subject them to discussion, encourage reflection, and begin to reveal the diversity of experiences in this phenomenon which, curiously, has shown itself to be a new reality, both unique and universal.

[89] **Footnotes**

F1. See, especially, Stainton, Stainton, & Musitu, 1994, and "Ramey, 1979. Less explicit associations can also be found in Money, 1985. Also see Money's inaugural address to the 10th World Congress of Sexology in 1991, recently published in our Country: Money, 1999.

F2. Emphasis is mine. The metaphor of a "shot," which brings to mind the inevitably lethal character of these acts, has been praised by Paul Ochotorena, a noted researcher of child mistreatment in our country. In the words of this author, in the prologue to Intebi's book, the use of these metaphors "can only occur when one knows what one is talking about." (Intebi, 1998: 17) The metaphor has been used in other contexts as a slogan that would appear in a pamphlet on the fight against child mistreatment: "The father's own childhood loads the gun. The conflicts of life are what he points it at, and on the specific aspect of the child's needs, squeezes the trigger."

F3. Certainly the opinions of authors such as Kinsey or Ullerstam concerning sexual contacts between children and adults now seem shocking and even sacrilegious, given the tone it has acquired in the current literature on the matter. In fact, my sense is that the same thing would happen upon reading the lion's share of what the leading researchers of around the middle of the twentieth century have written about abuse, using language that to many today, immersed in a second wave of social anxiety about abuse, would seem, to say the least, inappropriate.

F4. For some critical reflections on this see Gomez, 1993; on the prevention programs of an educational nature offered, see López, 1995.

F5. Though the sexual abuse of minors is spoken of in general terms and there is scarcely any interest in distinguishing between that which occurs within the context of the family and that which occurs outside of it, and one would have to inquire as to why, my intention is to spark interest in taking back these two categories that relate to radically different phenomena.

F6. This and other transcriptions of interviews originate from my own research into intervention on cases of sexual abuse on the part of various professional services. All of them were conducted between 1998 and 1999.

F7. A concept whose ideal model would be a "genital" one, i.e., the use of anatomically-correct dolls in the evaluation of these types of accusations. If the child plays with the genitals, the accused is lost.

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